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DRESSES FOR LITTLE GIRLS

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A radio talk by Miss Clarice L. Scott, Bureau of Home Economics,
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U. S. Department of Agriculture

You may be a bit surprised to know that on this summery day I am going to talk about autumn clothes. But, have you stopped to think how surprisingly short the time is before very little children will be back in nursery school and kindergarten? Doubtless their wardrobes will need a few additions before then, so here are some hints about the selection of little girls' dresses.

First of all, the styles. Time was when youngsters were dressed as miniature adults, but now-a-days we know that for little folks such styles may be harmful. A well dressed child is always dressed as a child. Her frocks are designed to meet her own requirements, with features that allow freedom for all kinds of active play, and room for growth. Besides, they fit in with the new ideas in child training, and are so simple that even a very tiny girl can learn to dress herself. It has been found that this ordinary every-day task teaches self-reliance and independence. Seems strange doesn't it, that clothes should be valuable aids in educating their small wearers. But they are, just the same, and all modern little children will be wearing self-help clothes this fall.

I think you might be interested in hearing about the dresses which we have on display at the Bureau of Home Economics. All have front openings, because little girls can manage them most easily. Some of the dresses are coat style, closing all the way down the front. Then, there are others which are easily slipped over the head because their plackets are sufficiently long.

All of the dresses have shaped, well-fitted shoulders to keep them from shifting. And it is here about the face that we have varied the dresses to give them interest. Some have shallow yokes of self material or of bias fagotted together; others have Shirring drawn in to fit stay pieces, and still others have stitched down pleats and tucks. Below these features the dresses swing loose and unbelted.

The sleeves are for the most part raglan style. We like them best because they are fashioned wide and roomy - just the thing for a growing child. Besides, they are surprisingly easy to construct and little fitting is necessary. In most cases, the sleeves are cut above the elbow. They allow more freedom and are not so quickly outgrown as are long sleeves. But we haven't forgotten that many little girls live where the warmth of long sleeves will be needed so we have a few, but with lots of elbow room and generous adjustable cuffs.

Necklines are cut comfortably low, especially in front, for dresses must never be allowed to pull back and choke, or become tight as the child grows. And speaking of growth, we have allowed a six or eight inch hem in every dress. I wish a trick might be devised for making hems self adjusting but since that can't be done, we make the job as easy as possible. Simply turn back the top edge of the hem a seam's width and stitch it by machine. This serves as a permanent foundation for the slip stitches which hold the hem in place. No matter how many times a dress is let out this fold is always in place.

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As to materials, - cottons are best for all around wear. However, just any cotton won't do. We choose a firm even weave that withstands hard wear, a soft texture that is comfortable, and a smooth surface that resists soil. As you may well guess, the colors are gay and the prints small in proportion to a child's size. The endless variety in the stores now-a-days makes selection a bit difficult at times, so we find it helpful to look at a favored piece apart from all others and to drape it in the length suggestive of a little girl's dress. This helps us to visualize the dress as it will appear when finished, and the selection is never disappointing.

I know you must be saying: "And what about trimming?" We use it, - but very sparingly, and only when it is needed to bring out a choice line or color. A gay print may need harmonizing bias; and a plain dress, a bit of simple stitchery, but whatever is used, we never lose sight of the practical. It must always be simple, flat, and as durable and as easy to launder as the dress it trims.

There are many other suggestions in a new illustrated leaflet just off the press. You may have it by simply writing to the Bureau of Home Economics, in Washington, or to your station and asking for U. S. Dept. of Agriculture Leaflet No. 80 - Dresses for Little Girls.